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ABSTRACT

This final report describes activities and accomplishments of a 4-year federal grant to provide statewide planning and improved educational and support services for 150 Louisiana children/youth with deafblindness. Activities and accomplishments are reported for each of six major objectives: (1) organizing project resources; (2) improving early identification procedures within school systems and other agencies; (3) increasing family access to services; (4) improving local capacity to serve students appropriately by providing services in least restrictive settings while ensuring that the curriculum results in functional outcomes and utilizes "best practice" standards; (5) assisting agencies in the design and implementation of transition services for young adults with deafblindness; and (6) examining the impact of systemic policies and practices on children and youth with deafblindness. (DB)

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Louisiana Services for Children and Youth with Deafblindness Federal Grant

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Final Report

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January 31, 2000

EC 307702

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LOUISIANA SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DEAFBLINDNESS

October 1, 1995 - September 30, 1999

FINAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Description of the Project

The Louisiana Services to Children and Youth with Deafblindness project encompassed statewide planning for 150 children/youth with deafblindness, from birth to 22 years of age, being served in local education agencies and residential schools for students with sensory impairments and mental disabilities. The overall goal the project was to improve the educational and support services provided to children and youth with deafblindness and their families in Louisiana. More specifically, the six major objectives included organizing resources, improving early identification procedures for children and youth with deafblindness, and increasing family access to services, improving local capacity to serve students appropriately, and improving transition services. There were no modifications to the goal during the course of the project.

Context

The impetus for the project came from the census data and the needs assessment surveys in Louisiana. This data indicated that very few children with deafblindness were identified and reported in the data. The data also revealed that most children were being served in classes with children with multiple disabilities; that most

teachers serving students with low incidence disabilities were not appropriately certified; and that many parents did not have knowledge about available services.

Objectives Accomplished

The following chart summarizes the concluding status of the objectives of the project. In brief, all six objectives were accomplished. Valuable new activities were added to Objectives 2, 3, 4, and 6.

Objective 2 involved improving the school system and the other agencies' ability to identify children and youth with deafblindness. INSITE training was provided and 45 early interventionists and service providers were trained. Additionally the state supervisor for Early Childhood Programs and Child Search was added to the Advisory Council. This will make collaboration Day Care Providers and statewide Child Search Activities easier and more consistent.

For Objective 3, which centered on increasing the ability of families to access services, the project staff collaborated with the LA State Autism Chapter, the Effective Practices Network, and the Division of Special Populations to implement the "Low Incidence Disabilities Team Training" which was offered to all LEAs. Each participating LEA sent a team consisting of 6 members including the parents of a "focus" student. A total of four days of training within three geographical regions of the state was followed by a mentoring project. Each team had the option to have a mentor (trained, school-based personnel) to visit on-site and provide technical assistance. Each team wrote an action plan for their focus student and the

student's current IEP was collected for evaluation and follow-up in the fall of 2000. This will increase the ability of the Project Director to measure change in local capacity as a result of the team training, mentor project, team evaluations and action plans, IEP review for pre and post training, and a telephone follow-up with parents of four students with deafblindness.

For Objective 4, which concentrated on LRE, functional outcomes, and best practices, the project staff and members of the Division of Special Populations planned and implemented a new statewide conference entitled, "Low Incidence Disabilities Summer Institute" during the summer of 1999. The conference was well attended by 225 teachers, parents, administrators, and service providers. The summer dates of the conference were significant because there is an increasing number of LEAs who limit the time that teachers are out of their classrooms during the school year. These participants attended on their own time and travel expense, thereby indicating their motivation to learn new strategies in the areas of communication, positive behavior support, and sensory integration. This was an encouraging event demonstrating the need for and desire of many school personnel for new information and training for their students with low incidence disabilities.

Systemic change was the focus for Objective 6, and the project staff completed the mandated state bulletins listed in the chart which have now been sent to the LA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. The project staff utilized written policies in the bulletins, a critical medium, to advocate for students with

deafblindness in federal and state law. A significant impact upon children and youth with deafblindness and their families is anticipated in the areas of assessment, orientation and mobility training, assistive technology, and accommodations for statewide assessment when the bulletins are officially printed and approved.

The *Access Guide to the General Education Curriculum* is a document prepared by a task force directed by the Division of Special Populations. Project staff served on the task force to develop helpful guidelines for facilitating students with disabilities to obtain access to the one curriculum. It is an outstanding document and will increase the local capacity of educators to adhere to the state content standards for students with disabilities.

TABLE 1

SUMMARY TABLE OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE	STATUS		
	A	ACPY	NA
Objective 1: Organize project resources in order to effectively complete the work scope of the project.	√	√	
1.1 Advisory Council Meetings were held on 10/23/98, 2/12/99, 4/16/99 and 9/10/99.	√	√	
1.2 Staff attended NTAC grant writing workshop, San Antonio, TX, 2/22-23/99.	√	√	
Meeting was held with Kat Stremel of NTAC to review evaluation procedures. 6/14-15/99.	√		
Project Director attended NTAC Alternate Assessment Meeting. 8/30-31/99.	√		
1.3 Louisiana Census of Children and Youth with Deafblindness was updated in March 1999.	√	√	
Objective 2: Improve the school systems' and other agencies' ability to identify children and youth with deafblindness.	√	√	
2.1 Statewide Low Incidence Disability Team Training was conducted 9/14-15/99 with 4 teams of the 30 teams consisting of school based personnel working with students with deafblindness.	√		

Code: A = Accomplished; ACPY = Accomplished in Previous 3 Years; NA = Not Accomplished.

	A	ACPY	NA
2.2 INSITE Training was conducted with 45 early interventionists from the local education and private provider agencies on 9/23-24/99.	√		
60 people were trained at a workshop on Sensory Integration sponsored by the project in Lafayette on 11/98.	√		
2.3 Project Director gave an inservice to 150 regular education high school students, faculty and staff members on Usher Syndrome.	√	√	
Project Director conducted an "Etiology of Deafblindness" inservice for 75 nurses of the Louisiana School Nurses Association on 8/5/99.	√	√	
Objective 3: Increase the ability of families to access services which meet the needs of the family unit as well as those of the child with deafblindness, aged birth through 21.	√	√	
3.1 Packets of general information on deafblindness and available state resources continue to be disseminated to families of individuals newly identified with deafblindness.	√	√	
3.2 Packets are also distributed to the system/agency serving the individual. This is an ongoing process.	√	√	
The Parent Conference on Visual Impairments included presentations on deafblindness to 200 parents and teachers on 12/4-5/98.	√	√	
3.3 A Needs Assessment Survey was discontinued for the final year of the project, but the information gained in previous years did drive the training and new grant application.		√	
3.4 Two presentations on the IEP and CHARGE Syndrome were	√	√	

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	A	ACPY	NA
conducted at the Council on Exceptional Children's Super Conference in Baton Rouge on 2/1-4/99			
3.5 Project staff participated in two SDE Parent Conferences that were held in Monroe on 11/5-6/99 and in Alexandria on 5/1-3/99.	√	√	
Objective 4: Improve the capacity of intervention and educational programs to appropriately serve children with deafblindness ages birth to 22 by: a) providing services in least restrictive settings; b) ensuring that the curriculum results in functional outcomes; and c) utilizing published "best practice" standards to evaluate and revise intervention/educational programs.	√	√	
4.1 The Project Director continued to serve on the management team for the Effective Practices Network: A Consortium for Instructional Personnel of Students with Low Incidence Disabilities. Other Network staff members were also included who were experienced in providing technical assistance to LEAs in the area of deafblindness.	√	√	
4.2 Region 1 of the state sponsored a workshop on "Access to the General Education Curriculum" featuring SDE personnel and project staff who presented on Louisiana's tool kit to the curriculum. The emphasis was on access for students with disabilities, including deafblindness. The workshop was in 3/99.	√		
4.3 "Visual Impairments and Deafblindness" was presented to 40 LSU general education students by project staff on 3/18/99.	√		

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	A	ACPY	NA
INSITE training was again conducted on 10/23-24/99 and 45 early interventionists were trained.	√	√	
4.4 Technical assistance was provided on-site to 186 parents, teachers, service providers and staff in school systems, state facilities and group homes with emphasis on the following topics: Awareness & Identification, Communication, and Usher Syndrome.	√	√	
4.5 January 1998 was the annual statewide Transition Conference in which project staff participated in two sessions on transition issues for students with deafblindness. Each session had 12-15 participants. The Project Director continues to serve on the management team for the Transition Grant.	√	√	
4.6 The Low Incidence Disabilities Summer Institute, sponsored by the SDE on 8/10-11/99, was held in Alexandria and featured two work-shops with significance for students with deafblindness. 200 people (parents, teachers, administrators, service providers) attended the workshops, one on Sensory Integration, the other on Communication. "Best Practices" standards were clarified.	√		
Again, best practices for assistive technology for students with deafblindness were emphasized at the Assistive Technology Conference, SDE sponsored, in Alexandria on 4/20-23/99.	√		
4.7 All technical assistance and training tasks sponsored by the SDE ensures that best practices are incorporated.	√	√	

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	A	ACYP	NA
Objective 5: Assist the appropriate agencies in the design and implementation of transition services for young adults with deafblindness.	√	√	
5.1 The Project Director serves on the technical assistance work team for the State Systems Change Grant for Transition from OSERS. The grant ensures the inclusion of students with deafblindness.	√	√	
Objective 6: Examine the impact of systemic policies and practices on children with deafblindness and their families.	√	√	
6.1 To ensure that the unique needs of students with deafblindness were included in all Louisiana mandated Bulletins and additional Bulletins, project staff participated in the revision of *Bulletin 1508: Louisiana Pupil Appraisal Handbook; Bulletin 1530: The IEP Handbook; Bulletin 1706: Louisiana's Law for Exceptional Children; and Bulletin 1617: A Resource Guide for Administrators and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments.* These Bulletins will be BESE approved in the school year 2000.	√		
6.2 Same as above	√		
6.3 Project staff serves on and/or provides information to committees on a regular basis. Currently the Project Director is serving on the Governor's Advisory Council for Technology Access by the Visually Impaired.	√	√	
The Project Director served on the *Access Guide to the General Education Curriculum* task force in order to enhance the unique	√		

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	A	ACPY	NA
needs of students with deafblindness in accessing the general curriculum.			
Project staff served on the Alternate Assessment task force for students with disabilities.. The "Criteria for Participating in Alternate Assessment" was developed for the state and the assessment will be published and piloted in the year 2000.	√		
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Implications

The last four years has been a time of learning and of formulating new ideas and targets for training. As a project staff we have learned much from listening to the field of consumers, parents and teachers who attended workshops, trainings and participated in technical assistance events. We tried to accommodate as much of this information into Louisiana's current grant as possible. New evaluation procedures in this the current four year project will enable us to build and expand this knowledge base. Thus ensuring that training and technical assistance will be even more useful, personal and "on target" for each student with deafblindness in Louisiana.

The core group of knowledgeable personnel is expanding in Louisiana. This enables us to have varied people, professional and family representatives, that are able to participate on committees, both for grant activities and to represent the field of deafblindness on any committee, taskforce or workgroup where decisions are made or policy is formulated. The next four years should be educational, enhancing and exciting for our field.